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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that role models from popular children's literature, such as Nancy Drew, can be used to resolve some of the current difficulties that women in the library profession have with leadership and communication. Some statistics and brief historical background on women in library administration are presented, the leadership qualities demonstrated by Nancy Drew are described, and an analogy is drawn between the leadership attributes of the fictional heroine and those needed in the library field. Strategies are suggested for changing librarians' personal self-concept and the image of the profession so that more women can enter leadership roles in librarianship. (21 references) (MES)

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IS THERE A NANCY DREW IN YOU? AN ATTEMPT TO RESOLVE SOME PROBLEMS OF COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP WITH THE HELP OF 'POPULAR' CULTURE

"All leadership takes place through the communication of ideas to the minds of others", said Charles Horton Cooley in his famed text Human Nature and the Social Order.[1] Librarians, particularly women, have had many problems in the area of leadership, as well as one of its most important corollaries - communication. It is my intention in this paper to show how we can use the role models of children's popular literature, such as Nancy Drew, to help resolve some of the current difficulties women in our profession have with leadership and communication.

The Bureau of Labor statistics indicate that 7% of the women employed in 1981 were classified as managers and administrators, compared to 15% for males. [2]This imbalance is demonstrated to a greater degree in the library profession, which is a pink-collar or female-intensive profession, suffering from "intraoccupational sex segregation",[3] in which men occupy the most important jobs and women fill the lower-paid, lower-ranking jobs. In the early years of the century a female library director was not a rare occurrence. Schiller found that the number of women directors of libraries reached a peak in the 1920's then began a decline which has only recently started to reverse itself.[4] Consistent documentation for the earlier years is sketchy. "In 1930, 27 percent of the nation's seventy-four largest academic libraries were headed by women, in 1967 only five percent were."[5] Although the proportion of

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female and male administrators has changed since 1970, the current statistics are still disappointing. In 1970, there were no women directors of ARL libraries. The 1987 ARL statistics show that there were 75 male and 28 female directors.[6] However, for a profession which is 75.8 percent female, this is still not representative. The reasons given for this lack of proportion in the representation of women as administrators are many, ranging from motivation factors to level of education, including, of course, cultural reasons such as paternalism, sexual conditioning, stereotyping and the inability to communicate that we both want to be leaders and can be leaders.

Having stated these commonly known facts, where does Nancy Drew come in, and how is she supposed to affect the careers of those women vying for the top leadership slots in the library field?

For those of you not familiar with our heroine, Nancy Drew was an intrepid blonde (later titian) girl sleuth, aged 16 (and later 18) who grew up in the mythical town of River Heights with her widower lawyer father Carson Drew. The first Nancy Drew mystery appeared in 1930, produced by the ubiquitous Stratemeyer Syndicate. The series is still going strong today, although Nancy has traded in her blue roadster and white gloves for a Mustang and designer jeans. Many significant women remember fondly their years reading Nancy Drew -

'Barbara Walters. "Seems to me I read all of them. It was escape. When you had some time to yourself, you could curl up in a chair in a corner with Nancy Drew."

Joan Mondale. "I was crazy about them."

Beverly Sills. "I loved them. She had a car and she was pretty and to us kids in Brooklyn, that was sophisticated.'7

For better or worse, popular culture is important to us. It both mirrors our real desires and values and helps shape them. Nancy Drew was a winsome and winning combination of pioneering and traditional characteristics. She solved mysteries, led a wonderfully independent life and yet at the same time stood for everything moral, upright and true. Her success was due not only to her innate leadership qualities, but to her ability to communicate these qualities to her friends, neighbors and all the people she worked with in solving her mysteries.

"Of Nancy Drew a great deal could be said, and yet her friends found it difficult to describe her. ...'She has that intangible something that makes one never forget her face.' Nancy was pretty in a distinctive way. Her eyes were blue, her hair golden. She spoke forcefully but never thought of thrusting her opinions upon others. In any crowd she unconsciously assumed leadership."

The Clue in the Diary

There was no doubt that she was a leader, and her many successes were due in no small part to her excellent communication skills - skills which we librarians would do well to take note of.

Nancy anticipated the current awareness of the importance of communication as a leadership attribute. She was ahead of her peers - and possibly her readers - in her awareness of behavioral psychology, and the 'assertive' rather than 'passive' or 'aggressive' mode of behavior.

Nancy was able to walk the fine line between being too aggressive or overbearing, and being too passive and therefore not taken seriously. This was explained in Psychology Today[8] with the help of a diagram of two overlapping circles of traditional masculine and feminine behavior. The overlap is the acceptable portion of female behavior that males can display and vica versa. The unacceptable areas include behavior that would be too agressive for a woman or too passive for a man. Nancy not only combines this behavior herself, but her cast of supporting characters nearly always includes two who were used as a more feminine and more masculine foil for her character. As Ann Richards, State Treasurer in Texas, said "You have to make the men feel comfortable. Just because you are a good ol'boy, does n't mean you are n't a lady."[9]

Nancy had a surefire sense of the importance of what is now called 'impression management'. This is the projection of a particular image of oneself to others. It is a social skill which includes not only monitoring one's own behaviour, but making careful observations of one's impact on others. Long before the appearance of the self-help book "Dress for Success,[10]" Nancy knew the importance of looking good. For example, The Mystery of the Brass Bound Trunk is much criticized by feminists for the fact that Nancy spends much of her time looking for her missing clothes. But if Nancy is dealing with such figures of authority as police inspectors, lawyers etc. whose respect she must command, she cannot appear looking mussed and crumpled. Many studies have been done comparing people who have been attired differently and given the same behavioral roles to play. The interview situation is commonly used.

Interviewees who dressed formally showed more leadership qualities, had an aura of authority and were perceived to be in command of themselves. Those dressed informally often behaved hesitantly, showed less motivation and were perceived as having less potential for leadership. It is critical that at all times we show an image of professionalism and leadership in order to be perceived as leaders or leadership material. The image of our profession itself is in many cases unclear in the minds of our patrons. Dressing as though for a walking tour may be comfortable, but will not project an image of leadership. This is especially important for part-time librarians, who have the extra weight of having to prove their professionalism to their colleagues, who may consider them to be earning a little pin money between children's school schedules. Dressing professionally ensures the right image. Nonverbal communication, such as dress and manner, is one of the most powerful means of expression.

Impression management is also one method of creating a healthy self-concept - the lack of which has recently been acknowledged as a problem for women within the library profession. Celia Wall discussed this in her article "Self-Concept: An Element of Success in the Female Library Manager". Her conclusion is that "A woman wanting or expecting to be successful in a library management position must possess a concrete idea of who she is, where she is going, and what she wants out of life. A positive self-concept is vital."[11] It seems that we are sometimes our worst enemies, and several articles have been written substantiating this argument. Jean Wellington, an associate professor of education at

Tufts University said that "...they (women) themselves are often unwilling party to their employment picture. A woman's own self-concept and her value system in relationship to her roles appear to play a part - perhaps a large part - in her overall position in the work force".12

As we upgrade our self-image, we must also overcome such conditioned responses as fear of success, self-doubt and the inability to use power. An achievement situation, such as moving up the career ladder, is competitive. Since competitive behavior is stereotypically equated with aggressive behavior, and considered by society to be unfeminine, this creates a great deal of conflict for women. Rather than fearing failure, they become motivated by fear of success, filled with an all pervasive self-doubt, and thereby incapacitate themselves.

Here is the reason why Nancy Drew was so successful and was looked up to by so many adolescent girls. Everything about Nancy was positive - she knew what she wanted, how to get it, and even where she was going, since every Nancy Drew story ends with a paragraph leading us into the next mystery to be solved. Her self-confidence was a wonderful tonic to the self-doubts constantly besetting her young readers, giving them confidence that - even though they may not have a little blue roadster - a positive attitude could win through.

One of Nancy's strongest points is her ability to deal with people. She manages her co-conspirators, knowing their strengths and weaknesses and uses them to their best advantages. As a manager generally, she is superb - organizing, delegating, instructing; achieving her objectives

through the art of gentle persuasion. Nancy is able to work with instead of against, and even control, the paternal, hierarchical society in which she lives. She communicates a sense of trust to everybody with whom she deals. Because leadership is a relationship between leader and followers, trust is essential for the execution of the leadership function. Nancy inspires trust in everybody, because she has a clear sense of her purpose, the 20/20 vision which ALA President Margaret Chisholm has correctly denoted as being essential to modern library leadership.

The previously cited article from Psychology Today[8] lists four contradictory sets of expectations that women must reconcile to succeed in their careers:- "1. Take risks, but be consistently outstanding ... be tough, but don't be macho ... 3. Be ambitious, but don't expect preferential treatment ... 4. Take responsibility, but follow others' directions." Perhaps the success of Nancy Drew can be attributed to the fact that she was able to reconcile these expectations, to pass through only the overlapping portion of the circles of seemingly contradictory expectations, to do what wasn't expected of her, whilst at the same time thinking enough of what was expected as a girl to gain acceptance. Readers, admirers and critics of Nancy Drew see her from two different perspectives. Many young readers in the 30's and 40's saw her as a precursor of today's feminist and liberated woman. But by many of the current line feminists, she is viewed as a suburban princess, preoccupied with murder because she has Daddy wrapped around her little finger and is relieved of the usual necessity of earning a living and a poor role

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model for today's young woman, who has been wearing Osh Kosh jeans and carrying a brief case since she could toddle. Nancy is able by the combination of family circumstances (one parent and plenty of money) to have it both ways - she is both protected and free. Time stands still for her as the eternal sophisticate school girl. It is a premise which is false for us and most of us realize this eventually and make the transition from fantasy to real life.

It is very clear that no matter how much we all adore Nancy Drew, we must learn to love her and leave her, to learn from her and progress on to the other stages in our lives. Nancy gets to stay in the idyllic pastures of River Heights where she never has to confront the problems of growing up, getting a job, being on her own, that young girls and women will inevitably face. The most important decision we each have to make as an individual is who we are, and the emulation of a role model or heroine, no matter how dear, only can be one stage in this discovery.

How do we go about getting on the leadership train? How do we communicate the fact that we both want to be leaders and can be leaders? How do we change the requirements for entry into what has been called "the library manager's club" where "The major criteria for entrance ... appear to be age, years of experience and sex - over 45, roughly ten years of experience, and male".[13] It has been demonstrated clearly - in many different fields - that this situation results not from women being incapable of holding a top leadership/management position, but of being perceived this way. As Dr. Johnson once remarked to Boswell "a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done

well; but you are surprised to find it done at all."[14] Swisher, DuMont and Boyer however found "no evidence of any significant difference between the motivation-to-manage scores of males and females"[15] and concluded that there was no data to support the hypothesis that females are less likely than males to want to be leaders or managers.

It is possible to change not only our own personal self-concept, but the image of our profession as well. It is not easy, but it can be done. It does entail the necessity of understanding what leadership is. How do we choose our heroes and heroines? What is it that gives leadership to some and denies it to others? When Swisher, Dumont and Boyer studied the motivation-to-manage of librarians and library school students, one unexpected finding was that the group studied as a whole rated much lower than other population groups. "It seems that both men and women select librarianship as a career because a large majority do not want to be managers. Professions dominated by women - such as librarianship - are widely believed to emphasize 'feminine' qualities such as nurturance, empathy, understanding, helpfulness and intuitiveness. Managerial positions do not fit this feminine model. They are characterized by such personal attributes as decisiveness, consistency, objectivity, emotional stability and analytical ability".15 Nancy exemplified these characteristics instinctively. In The Mystery at the Ski Jump, she pondered what advice her father would have given her: "He'd say, 'Use your head, daughter! You can't just chase after this Mrs. Channing as if she were a butterfly. You must outsmart her!"

Is it possible that because librarianship is seen as a female profession, our leaders - both male and female - are discounted to begin with? Is it also possible that many librarians consider themselves to have failed first in other professions, and therefore not fit for a leadership role? Are librarianship and leadership incompatible? The fact that these are serious questions is demonstrated by the profession's inability to have a librarian as the head of the national library - the Library of Congress. A poet, a historian, an educator - to name just a few - but nary a librarian.

Charles McClure discoursed on this theme in 1980 in his article entitled "Library Managers: Can They Manage? Will They Lead?" "Academic library managers have not provided leadership in solution of societal information problems, nor have they effectively utilized innovative managerial techniques to administer the library."16 We find ourselves reacting to user needs instead of anticipating them, attempting to resist takeovers from university computing centers, struggling to maintain our interface between the user and information.

According to Cooley, "The first requisite of a leader is, not to be right, but to lead, to show a way."1 We librarians are spending billions of dollars a year on automation, yet all our online catalogs do is put a 3x5 card on an 8x11 screen. We are devoted to manual files in agate boxes. Did the packaging industry turn itself into as many knots over the use of OCR's as we have done over moving to barcodes? Private industry has been using laser technology for years. Why are we librarians so uncomfortable with a light pen? Do we really feel that

Darth Vader will sprint out in front of the CIRC desk to challenge us to a duel for eternity, or are we only comfortable with date stamps and quill pens?

As Frank Newman, president of the Education Commission of the States said "The process of scholarship that we all enjoy so much must - like every other aspect of our society adapt or be passed by."[17] Unless we develop a sense of where we are going and can communicate this to our patrons, there will be no need for librarians in the twenty first century. Thomas Hennen expressed this same concern with reference to public libraries, which he says "may have a future only because they already exist, not because there is any compelling need for them."[18] We are already seen by many patrons today as impeding access to information rather than facilitating it. The image of the librarian whose idea of heaven would be to get rid of all the patrons in the library is something we have to change. We cannot create leaders for a profession with such negative images. Robert Grover and Martha Hale in "The Role of the Librarian in Faculty Research" take this very theme and develop a scenario for the librarian to depart from the passive or reactive level of service and "assume a proactive role",[19] in this case in the research process. Leadership is taking over from technology as the crucial issue to be faced by our profession. At the end of the recent OCLC Conference on the Future of the Public Library, participants were asked to list their greatest hopes and worst fears for the future. The worst fear was that "Librarians' leadership will be inadequate to the challenges of the future."[18] This was balanced by the greatest hope that "Libraries will

adapt to the future successfully through creative leadership and excellence in staff development."18

Going back to my original quotation from Charles Cooley, "All leadership takes place through the communication of ideas to the minds of others".1 If first we can communicate an awareness of the difference between the stereotype and reality, then we are on our way to achieving Margaret Chisholm's theme, "Motivate, Inspire, Lead".

Firstly, we should learn to be our own publicist, both as a profession and as individuals. A strikingly successful example of this is New York Public's recent publicity campaign, one of their current slogans being "Thanks to the Library, American dance has taken great leaps forward". This is one of the simplest and most straightforward forms of communication - an advertising campaign. Communication truly does not have an opposite. All behaviors have a communicative value and people cannot help but respond to our behavior. Therefore, if the image we are communicating is not positive, it must be negative. We must learn to objectify ourselves, make sure we are evaluated not on the stereotype, but on objective achievements and accomplishments, conduct personal advertising campaigns, maintain a high profile. We cannot rely on other people or professions to say how great we are or to discover it for themselves. Read some of those self-assertion books. If nothing else, you will learn some important tips. For instance, how to deal with the fact that when speaking, women get cut into more often than men: the importance of eye contact, making sure your verbal cues are the same as your body language: how to chair successful meetings: how to determine

and achieve your objectives: how not to end spoken statements with inflections that imply uncertainty and how not to act apologetically for normal business decisions. Information is power. Make sure that you know what is going on in your institution, in your local and national organizations, that you are a part of the policy-making groups and that you do not get shut out of meetings you need to attend. Librarians are not the only professionals who have been forced to develop self-assertion techniques. The nursing profession has produced a variety of manuals addressing the barriers which need to be overcome, and which touch not only on the unique nature of nursing but also on the whole female sex role socialization process.

There is currently a national trend cutting across all professions that indicates women are at last beginning to break through the 'glass barrier' - the current term for the impenetrable, invisible barrier that has kept women from rising into top management positions. In 1979, women held 4 percent of elected mayoral offices in the nation. In 1985 that had increased to 14.6 percent.[9] In the latest ARL Annual Salary Survey, 1987, salaries of men overall averaged 12.8% higher than the salaries of women. However, one noteworthy exception was the average salary for women directors: $76,862, or $733 higher than the average salary for male directors. In the past five years, the average salary of women directors has increased about 7.5% faster than the salaries of their male counterparts. What was a $3,565 gap in favor of men in 1982 is now a $733 edge in favor of women.[20] Several organizations have evolved over

the years to try to redress these inequalities and we should become involved in them. The Committee on the Status of Women in Librarianship (COSWL), a standing committee of ALA, was established in 1976 to address some of these issues. In 1977, the Office of Women in Higher Education of the American Council on Education (ACE) began a National Identification Program for the Advancement of Women in Higher Education Administration. This parallels similar movements in the worlds of business and government, where we find - just to mention a few - Catalyst, a nonprofit organization that helps corporations promote women in business, and the Foundation for Women's Resources, whose aim is to annually identify and develop women leaders in every state.

The Roman Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus, teacher of Epictetus said: "Women have received from the god the same rational faculty as men, the faculty that we use in communicating with one another and in reasoning about each matter".21 Believing this to be the case, and counting on our ability to improve our communication skills both personally and professionally, let us take all those positive adjectives from the Nancy Drew books, add them to the gentler adjectives so scorned by our militant comrades, and emerge as complete human beings. The primary function of a leader is to create a vision and then to implement it. Without communication, this cannot be accomplished.

"An owl hooted nearby. The darkness beneath the overhanging trees seemed forbidding. Suddenly Nancy felt panicky, but resolutely she put aside her fears....

Dick spoke up earnestly, "you might be risking your life for us, Nancy. Lilac Inn isn't worth that."

Nancy set her jaw, "I must outwit my impersonator before she outwits me. And if I do, I'm positive I'll solve the mysteries of this place, too." "

The Mystery at Lilac Inn

Determination, resoluteness, courage, steadfastness, risk-taking and above all - leadership. These qualities are exemplified in the above paragraph and communicated to us via their personification in the character of Nancy Drew. She is the heroine of one of the most popular and longest-running series books for girls, the role model and fictitious companion for some of today's most outstanding women. Look for her next adventure - The Mystery of the Missing Librarian - in which Nancy will pit her wits against the tsar of the Computing Center, foil attempts to destroy the library's online system, and receive an award from the Friends of the Libraries in recognition of her services.

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